Stud East Eur Thought (2010) 62:279–298
DOI 10.1007/s11212-010-9117-8

The cultural hermeneutic of Russia's historical experience: the case of Aleksandr Samojlovič Akhiezer

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Published online: 27 October 2010

Abstract The article presents an overview of A. S. Akhiezer's reconstruction of Russia's socio-cultural history as a cultural hermeneutic. The underlying idea is that the way humans make sense of their existence is driven by an algorithm of meaning production informing the organization of their 'world', in particular the selection of the means involved in that production. Thus the central axis of Akhiezer's hermeneutic, methodogically, is symbolization: 'worlds', that is, socio-cultural matrices, are made according to and reflect specific modes of symbolization. Akhiezer's account of the Russian socio-cultural experience is centred on the particular algorithm that he names *raskol* (schism). His purpose was twofold: to examine the 'logic' of *raskol*, on the one hand, and to investigate, on the other hand, in the manner of a historian, its impact and consequences for Russian society at large, including its effects on institution-building. In this way, the study of *raskol* goes hand in hand with an investigation of and commentary concerning the uncertain state in Russia of what Akhiezer named the *bol'šoe obščestvo* (roughly, the modern differentiated, dynamic institutional order). In effect, his theory is a social ontology with culture at the centre.

Keywords Akhiezer · Cultural hermeneutic · Culture theory · Russian history · The 'big society' · *Raskol* (schism) · Bolshevism · Philosophizing · Political culture

Setting the stage

Writing cultural theory can be a tricky business. All the more so when it is crafted in the former Soviet Union. Context and motivation, the why and wherefore of cultural

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theory, have been especially significant in this case, imbuing the discourse with surplus meaning. Current cultural theory in Russia took shape in a complex context, the make-up and import of which have been and remain contested issues. It is the "post-Soviet context" the salient characteristic of which, in terms of the discourses of/on culture, has been widespread fixation on historical continuity, cultural identity, and the 'real meaning' of the Russian historical record. From the start, the discourse of Russian cultural theory carried an illocutionary force that went well beyond description, analysis, and 'theory'. The particular context-sensitivity of Russian cultural theory imparted political overtones to it. In the midst of the trauma following the breakup of the Soviet Union raising the banner of 'culture' in the virtually amorphous 'post-Soviet' reality carried many and divergent meanings, depending on the actors.[1] As such, therefore, such imperatives were contestable; they could be called into question.

I will start with a schematic overview of mainstream Russian cultural theory—*kul'turologija*—as background to the work of Aleksandr Samoilovič Akhiezer. Although his work is on the whole orthogonal to 'mainstream' Russian cultural theory, the pathos that tends to pervade the latter is not absent from his work. Thus his conception of the course of Russian culture is at once 'somewhat like' and 'quite different from' other extant cultural theories in Russia. My choice to concentrate on his work is explained by his presence on the Russian intellectual scene over the course of two decades with a spate of diverse and interesting publications. He had the reputation of the 'lone wolf', with a vision and a style that was very much his own. The main parts of the paper are a summary account with accompanying commentary of selected aspects of Akhiezer's theory.

Kul'turologija in general

Informed scholars (Kelly and Shephard 1998; Epstein 1995) have drawn attention to the differences between 'cultural theory' that took form in the United Kingdom and spread to the United States and parts of Western Europe and its nominal counterpart in the Russian academic context, *kul'turologija* (directly translated by the German *Kul'turwissenschaft*; the expression *kul'turovedenie* (more or less 'culture studies') is not standardly used). There is no contact and exchange between the currents to speak of; Western cultural theorists (with the exception of Slavists) have taken no notice of Russian studies, while Russian reception of Western 'cultural theory' is found in, for example, gender studies,[2] not in mainstream *'kul'turologija'*.[3] This

[1] There is nothing new about this in the context of Russian society throughout the twentieth century: it is fair to say that a veritable obsession with culture since before the Revolution and then in the Soviet period (the label *'kul'turnost'', 'kul'turnyj čelovek'*) has been a hallmark of the society and its intellectuals.

[2] Cf. the 'special issue' of this journal "Gender and Culture Theory in Russia Today" (2003).

[3] I am abstracting from Western Slavists, cultural historians, art critics and the like. There are exceptions. Most evident among them is the attention given to the statements about all things Russian by such personalities as Boris Groys, Mikhail Epstein, Mikhail Ryklin, and Boris Gasparov, to name only the most prominent. One reason for their success in relation to their far less illustrious co-nationals is that they are either established in the Western academic circuit (Groys, Epstein, Gasparov) or are frequent

situation is explained in part by the language barrier: the dearth of translations of works in current *kul'turologija* contributes to the situation as described.[4] But in addition to this long-standing impediment to scholarly exchange a more serious consideration looms large: the few extant assessments of current Russian cultural theory outside Russia (and within as well) have been largely critical of it (Scherrer 2002, 2003; Laruelle 2003/2004; Swiderski 1993). On the one hand, the phenomenon has been seen as symptomatic of the state of affairs in the Russian human and social sciences following the demise of Marxism-Leninism. It has been described as a kind of *sauve qui peut* on the part of those who formerly laboured in departments of historical materialism and scientific communism (Bazhanov 1999). These commentators perceive a continuity between the defunct "M-L world view" and (certain forms of) *kul'turologija*, in part in content as well as in the manner or style of presentation as grand narrative combining (pseudo-) scientific with ideological-normative claims about the universal course of human culture (comparisons with civilizational theorists of yesteryear—Spengler, Toynbee, among the Russians Sorokin, but especially Danilevskij and the first generation of Eurasianists—recommend themselves). In this regard *kul'turologija* has conveyed claims about Russia's 'cultural-civilizational' uniqueness, echoing affirmations familiar from the nineteenth century.

On the other hand, critical voices have been raised, within the Russian academic establishment itself (e.g. Zvereva 2003), regarding the scientific credentials of the phenomenon. Inspection of typical *kul'turologija* texts (numerous textbooks, but also dictionaries, encyclopaedias (Levit 1997; Razlogov 2005; Spivak 2001); rather than scholarly monographs) that arrived *en masse* on the Russian book market in the wake of the regime change reveals the eclectic character of the discipline as it was taking form. In addition, the typical texts juxtapose more or less elaborated historiosophical motifs about distinctive civilizational types presented in the style of the grand narrative that frames an array of specific themes familiar from the human and social sciences; the former usually lends an overarching normative framework to the latter which critics have suspected of harbouring ideological tendencies (for instance in relation to the call during the El'cin era for a 'new' integral national ideology).[5] It is for this reason that comparisons with cultural theory elsewhere have

Footnote 3 continued
visitors (Ryklin). Their texts are widely translated. As a general rule, little if anything at all ties them to the sort of mainstream *kul'turologija* under discussion here.

[4] Translations of which I am aware are found in Bykova (2003; English translations) and Raiser, Uffelmann, Ackermann (1995; German translations).

[5] A close empirical study of this project for a new national idea is by Bettina Sieber (1998). To be sure, Russian human and social sciences throughout the Soviet period had thrown up examples of fruitful 'culturological' research that did acquire recognition outside Russia. I am thinking in the first place of the Tartu-Moscow structural semiotics school (Lotman, Uspenskij, Ivanov), the Annales-inspired historical culture theory practiced by A. Gurevič, as well as the work of cultural historians such as Meletinskij, Knabe, and Averincev. More recently Aleksandr Dobrokhotov has added his voice to this discussion; he is presently working up a systematic 'metaphysics' of culture based to a large extent on these sources. Nor can the name of Bakhtin be omitted from any such short list of prominent Russian 'cultural' theorists. On the whole, with few exceptions so far as I can ascertain, these 'Russian' resources were largely missing from the texts of the first post-soviet generation of culturological discourse.

little basis. The discourse-centered, 'constructivist' (i.e. deconstructivist), interpretational, nominalist (anti-essentialist), anti-establishment etc. orientation of leading-edge Western cultural theory is largely absent in Russian *kul'turologija* texts (exceptions to this rule are texts by Russians who are versed in Western-style 'cultural theory' and reside in Europe or North America).

Thus, despite its stated 'universalist' aspirations, mainstream *kul'turologija* has remained a 'local' Russian phenomenon.[6] As stated above, a preoccupation with 'culture' has been and remains a constant feature of Russian self-representation.[7] By the same token, *kul'turologija* was part of a response on the part of the intelligentsia to 'crisis', viz., the perceived loss of normative foundations in a society abruptly released from the tutelage of the dysfunctional Soviet culture—a release fraught with conflicting emotions—and for that very reason all the more sensitized to the 'spiritual' distance separating Russia from her 'authentic' culture (never mind the hitherto imperfectly assimilated 'Western' culture). The perceived contrast as well as discontinuity between the defunct Soviet culture and the potentially 'authentic' but temporally remote Russian (pre-Soviet) culture brought about the 'culture syndrome' (the quest for historical identity). The general thesis began to circulate that defining new values and cultural imperatives would be a saving grace and spiritual remedy in trying times.

But there was an additional coefficient. For a while in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet establishment, *kul'turologija* virtually deputized in post-Soviet Russia for disciplines that make up the human and social sciences and which found themselves struggling in the wake of the implosion of the 'Marxist-Leninist world view'. It acquired the status of a kind of meta-discourse that delineated, again normatively rather than descriptively, a realm of 'objects' including culture-in-general, civilizational types, society, history, all-human values, even man, etc.—with reference to which these disciplines were to reconstitute their perspectives.[8] In this (on the whole self-appointed) capacity *kul'turologija* was de facto, if not formally, filling the void created by the collapse of '*istmat*' and '*naučnyj kommunizm*', the former master discourse for Soviet-style human and social sciences. Under these circumstances, however, universalist the rhetoric of *kul'turologija* appeared to be, the 'local' reference, viz., the 'cultural syndrome' in the wake of the Soviet collapse, was (is) its characteristic feature. This was reinforced by the ubiquitous presence of *kul'turologija* as a core requirement in university curricula.[9]

[6] I often employ single quotes to pick out expressions which are common currency in 'cultural' discourse in Russia today and which are, moreover, polysemic (depending on the context of usage). In their case, the line between ordinary and scholarly (theoretical) usage is largely indistinct and absent with the result that fixing definitions is often difficult. This is one reason why cultural theory in Russia is, to reiterate, a tricky business fraught with extra-theoretical connotations.

[7] Akhiezer, for instance, has written that philosophy in Russia has been and remains turned in on itself, that is to say, the object of philosophy in Russia is Russia itself, a frame of mind he seeks to explain with reference to ideologized religious motives—Russia as a vessel for the Sacred. "Rossija—predmet social'noj filosofii i nauki" (n.d. unpublished manuscript).

[8] Cf. Batygin (2004) and Serebriany (2005).

[9] It should not be concluded from this that *kul'turologija* was unanimously acclaimed. On the contrary, besides being for many a laughing stock, a mock discipline and not a science, it was attacked on institutional grounds (for instance by the former director of the Institute of Philosophy in Moscow,

Akhiezer's brand of *kul'turologija* can be read as a caveat, if not an exception, to the state of affairs as described. Whereas mainstream *kul'turologija* forged ahead in the spirit of its universalist, essentialist, 'all-human' aspirations, Akhiezer, though in step with *kul'turologija's* predilections for grand 'civilizational' narrative, opted for a narrower perspective. He can be described as the theoretician of 'cultural-crisis-in-Russia'. The hyphens are meant to indicate the complex object that Akhiezer constructed as his domain of investigation: not 'cultural crisis' *tout court*, but a particular form thereof, marked by the "…-in-Russia" qualification. Rather than depart from general models of human culture and/or civilizational types in order then to identify Russia's place therein—as unique, specific, as lagging and *'dogonjaščija'*, etc.—Akhiezer first set about reconstructing Russia's historical record from within, so to speak, in order to construe, from that perspective, a model of socio-cultural development, possibly with broader applications.

As we will see, his claim is that Russia's 'socio-cultural essence', if the expression be allowed, is that of being in a virtually permanent 'crisis', that is, a state of dynamic instability marked by an underlying impetus (a 'motor' of historical movement) operating at the symbolic level as an algorithm of socio-cultural meaning, a 'social imaginary' (Taylor 2004, Castoriadis 1975). His research and the theory resting on its basis can be read as an analytic of the Russian 'imaginary', as a cultural hermeneutic. In general, Akhiezer's is a theory about how 'subjects' (an expression that is ambiguous and to which I will return) attribute meaning to their 'worlds' and how in the process they generate a 'style' and 'logic' (algorithm) of meaning production. As regards Russia, the algorithm that Akhiezer claims has pervaded the Russian socio-cultural 'matrix' is captured by the term *raskol*, meaning rift, schism. Connoted thereby is a single field of force—a socio-cultural matrix—within which binary oppositions of a 'cultural' nature (i.e. values and norms) exert influence, exhibiting varying degrees of opposing, indeed conflicting tendencies, thus producing dynamic instability, viz., the danger of disorganization, even implosion of the matrix, on the one hand, though on the other hand offset, at least potentially, by constructive, organic tendencies should the binary oppositions succeed in intermingling.[10]

Recalling a title from a supplement to *Le Monde* a couple of decades ago, Akhiezer could be described as a theoretician of a society which is 'malade de sa culture', though in this case with a twist. Russia has generated coping techniques,

Footnote 9 continued
Vjačeslav Stëpin; in a discussion the present author held with him he railed against a system in which 'kul'turologii' were taking up posts in philosophy departments to the detriment of specialists in the domain). The '*kul'turologija*' at issue here has to be distinguished from the kind of work that is associated with, for instance, the Moscow-Tartu semiological school (Lotman, Uspenskij), and the various 'philological' (literary) conceptions that were well-established in Russian academia. This kind of 'cultural theory' was taught by Dobrokhotov, at the MGU, head of the Chair for the History and Theory of World Culture (formerly directed by V.V. Ivanov, who had resettled in the USA).

[10] Another culturologist, working roughly with the same intentions as Akhiezer, is Igor' Kondakov. He uses the expression 'algorithm' or 'configurator' and distinguishes, with regard to Russian historical course, five such coefficients in a successive ordering: accumulation, divergence, cultural synthesis, selection, convergence. One is reminded here of Luhmann's thesis of 'Ausdifferenzierung' (Kondakov 2000).

has learned to live with her 'maladie', indeed it has become intrinsic to her identity, a factor to take into account in explanations of her seemingly constant socio-cultural, institutional instability. Is this *kul'turologija* with a vengeance?

Reading Akhiezer: initial approaches

An earlier draft of this paper (June, 2008) was written in ignorance of the death of its chief protagonist; I learned subsequently that Aleksandr Samoilovič Akhiezer died in October 2007 (he was born in 1929). He was educated as an economic statistician and in the Soviet period was employed by the Institute of Economic Forecasting (previously in the Institute of the international labor movement). As regards the work for which he will be remembered it seems to have been initially written 'for the drawer' (there was no chance for publication under Soviet conditions) and is the result of intense research carried out in relative isolation (clandestinely). He never held an academic post, did not spawn a school (by way of students), and only acquired the *doktorskaja* degree—in philosophy from the *Institut filosofii* in Moscow, where he resided—shortly before his death.[11] As a writer he flourished following the demise of the Soviet Union, producing a sizeable body of publications in which Russia and Russia alone are at issue. In the nineties, he along with several others established an 'independent seminar' (a discussion group which was the basis for a clutch of joint publications), the *Moskovskij nezavisimyj seminar sociokul'turnykh issledovanii rossijskogo obščestva*.[12]

Akhiezer's work was at once eclectic and focused. He could be characterized in relation to several disciplines, as philosopher, sociologist, historian, cultural sociologist, methodologist (in the social and human sciences), political/social analyst-commentator, all of these focused on the 'Russian historical experience'. He 'flooded the market', so to speak, writing frequently for a broad variety of intellectual and academic journals/publishers, representing distinct disciplines (from philosophy to sociology, psychology to political science, econometrics and social forecasting to current politics in Russia). Without exception, however, he labored a clutch of themes and concepts which together make up his "cultural hermeneutic" of the Russian socio-cultural process. Depending on the public for which he happened

[11] I have come across one synthetic treatment in Russian of Akhiezer's work and the conditions under which it arose (by one of his former collaborators), S. Ja. Matveeva (1997–1998) Raskolotoe obščestvo: Put' i sud'ba Rossii v sociokul'turnoj teorii A. Akhiezera, the introduction to the second edition of Rossija …1997–98.

[12] Let me remark parenthetically: there has been little research into the interaction among different 'categories' of scholars in Russia. Sociologically, the situation is, I believe, rather unique: Russian 'science' and 'scholarship' are divided among the universities, the various institutes in the Academy of sciences (many of which have converted since the demise of the SU into university-like faculties dispensing teaching services to paying clients and/or living off grants from private, frequently non-Russian, foundations), and so-called 'independent seminars/institutes', a context originating possibly in the coping techniques developed by (quasi-)dissident scholars during Soviet times. Just what these latter do today, how they publicize their activity, disseminate their 'scientific results', to what effect, and whether the individuals associated with these centres acquire symbolic capital qua 'independent scholars' whose works count as contributions to scholarship—these are questions worthy of more intensive research than they have received. I took a hand in some of this research. (Batygin et al. (2005)).

to be writing, he foregrounded this or that theme backgrounding others, though the 'message' broadly speaking remained consistent from context to context.[13]

Akhiezer came to his views early, indeed they are present virtually *in toto* in the publication—*Rossija: kritika istoričeskogo opyta* (1991; second edition 1997–98)—which marked his entry into the culturological arena, but which had taken form over the course of many years preceding the collapse of the Soviet Union. The first edition (1991) appeared in three volumes of which one is 'methodological' (how the cultural hermeneutic is conceived and conducted), another offers the substantive analysis of Russia's historical record, while the last is an extensive glossary of terms (Akhiezer, in effect, was laying claims to innovative research altogether outside the restrictive, dogmatic pale of Soviet istmat and *kul'turologija*.) In 2006, he published a volume titled simply *Trudy* that covers the essence of his work during the period subsequent to the publication of *Rossija* and is in most respects an elaboration of the main themes of the latter (it is the primary source for the present paper).

As noted Akhiezer was no stranger to joint labor: several of his titles are mostly the fruit of collective enterprise. The present writer had occasion, in 2002, to spend an afternoon in the company of the members of a *domašnyj seminar,* under Akhiezer's leadership, who hailed from distinct scholarly domains but were united in their concern for Russia's present state and future course and practiced cultural hermeneutics more or less along Akhiezer's lines.[14] Their joint publications adhere on the whole to a technique familiar from Soviet times: parts or chapters of a book are divided among a team of writers even though the whole is presented as if one voice is speaking.[15]

In 2000, one of Akhiezer's collaborators, Andrej P. Davydov, identified four main thematic areas which together make up the object of the cultural hermeneutic whose chief protagonist was Akhiezer (Davydov 1999, pp 8–9). (1) The development of a *socio-cultural analysis* of the dynamics of Russian society; (2) a theory of Russia's *cyclical development*, in particular, the analytics of *raskol* (schism) and the correlative threat of society-wide 'catastrophes'; (3) an interpretation of *philosophizing* in the context of the 'specific' circumstances of existence in Russia; (4) a typology of *normative ideals* that orientate any given socio-cultural matrix. As if to confirm this subdivision of his interests, Akhiezer in 2006 (*Trudy*) structured his book around three main themes: (1) the specificity of Russian history; (2) catastrophes in nature and society as a normative problem (*nravstvennaja problema*); (3) the characteristic features of contemporary philosophizing.

[13] I have found the following online bibliographies of Akhiezer's works; none is complete.
http://demoscope.ru/center/biblio/bib_akhi.html
http://demoscope.ru/weekly/2008/0355/biblio/bib_akhi.php
http://publ.lib.ru/ARCHIVES/A/AHIEZER_Aleksandr_Samoylovich/_Ahiezer_A._S..html

[14] The persons who appear to have collaborated with Akhiezer on a regular basis, starting in 1991 include: V.V.Il'in, I.V. Kondakov, I.G. Jakovenko, I. Kljamkin, A.P. Davydov, E.N. Jarkova, B.G. Fedotova, S.Ja. Matveeva, M.A. Šurovskij, A.I. Utkin. It would be too much to claim that these writers were all of one mind or that Akhiezer was an undisputed authority for them.

[15] It is not clear to this writer just what kind of influence Akhiezer wielded; his name was generally familiar, though with the exception of *Rossija: kritika istoričeskogo opyta* his texts were not the object of critical analysis and commentary. In certain circles in Moscow he was referred to rather unkindly as a 'grafoman'.

Two clarifications and an initial comment are in order. First, in this usage philosophizing is not to be understood with reference to professional academic philosophy. Rather, the term is meant to convey the idea that any given relatively consistent socio-cultural matrix is driven from within by a quest for patterns of intelligibility. In order to exist and reproduce itself, a socio-cultural matrix requires some pervasive but underlying algorithm for 'making sense' of reality, i.e. of its contact with the 'world'. Perhaps a kindred term familiar from recent Western cultural theory would be, as noted above, the 'imaginary' (e.g. Castoriadis' 'imaginaire radical', Charles Taylor's 'social imaginary'). Akhiezer also uses the term *osmyslenie*.

The second point concerns 'normative ideals'. Akhiezer had in mind something akin to Weber's 'forms of rationality'. Like the latter, Akhiezer offers a typology of normative ideals; it includes so-called 'ancient' ideals (*sobornost'*, authoritarianism, the prevalence of value-rationality), 'utilitarianism' (roughly coinciding with Weber's 'instrumental rationality'), 'liberalism' (i.e. rationality centered on individual agency conducive to innovation), as well as the concept of the 'normative hybrid' (the typical situation in socio-cultural development and/or implosion). Normative ideals make up the content of 'philosophizing', that is, they are at the heart of an algorithm for socio-cultural meaning (*osmyslenie dejstvitel'nosti*).

Now given the prominence attributed here to meaning, normativity, and the like it seems reasonable to assume that subjectivity would be a central component of this cultural hermeneutic. In fact, however, the opposite appears to be true. It will become clear that 'subjectivity' is virtually missing in Akhiezer's work; 'philosophizing', 'normative ideals', the socio-cultural process as a whole are cast instead in historicist, virtually 'cultural determinist' terms. The principal agency in the picture Akhiezer draws is the socio-cultural process itself, and individual 'real' subjects are caught up in its logic, at least as Akhiezer presents it with respect to the Russian case. However, we will return to the issue and ask whether this absence of subjectivity is a serious oversight in the cultural hermeneutic or instead a central finding thereof, that is, whether the missing 'subject' is in fact a salient characteristic of the Russian socio-cultural process.

In effect, taking the full measure of Akhiezer's designs is not an easy matter, for on the whole he wrote 'in a vacuum', with precious little reference to other thinkers and theories to which his work could be compared. Occasionally, he did cite a source he appeared to consider significant and compatible with his own views, though typically without accompanying commentary. Did he identify with some tradition or a particular community of discourse in the social and human sciences? It is difficult to say, although in reading his texts associations come to mind frequently. In the few conversations I held with him, he remained unimpressed by my attempts to draw his attention to parallels between his model and those of contemporary social and cultural theorists elsewhere.[16] There is little doubt that he considered himself a path-breaker, an innovator, in the cultural hermeneutics of the

[16] He was more impressed by the efforts of Dr Axel Kaehne (Cardiff) who went to the trouble of addressing Akhiezer's views of the nature of the political process in an exchange first published in *Neprikosnovennyi zapas* and later in the web journal *Eurozine*. http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2003-03-05-kaehne-en.html.

Russian historical experience, and that whatever the commonalities between his conceptions and socio-cultural theory elsewhere, the former take precedence over the latter, as Russia in his view is a singular case.[17]

To be sure, his model cannot be exempted from a critical appraisal, for instance in historical research. One important question is whether the results of his cultural hermeneutic of the Russian experience are historiographically sound, whether they capture not only the 'essence' but likewise the details of Russia's historical record.[18] Akhiezer did acknowledge that his method trades largely in ideal types, for which reason it has more a modeling, interpretational rather than a narrative import. The conception stands or falls in case it succeeds better than others in modeling the course of the Russian socio-cultural process by means of categories introduced for this purpose. But of interest to me is the philosophical line therein. He was after all a regular contributor to *Voprosy filosofii,* publishing long and detailed texts with titles such as "Ob osobennostjakh sovremennogo filosofstvovanija.

Vzgljad iz Rossii" (1995) or "Rossija kak bol'šoe obščestvo" (1993).[19] The issue I wish to examine is how Akhiezer understood the interpretative model he applied to discriminate and analyze the 'Russian historical experience'.

Akhiezer's narrative of the Russian historical experience presents an imaginary that is not the inveterate 'Russia vs Europe (the West)' coupling. In his perception, the Russian historical imaginary involves a relatively closed symbolic and existential space characterized by an oscillation between what he calls 'syncretism' and 'differentiation'. The former has to do with the algorithm of *osmyslenie* Akhiezer terms 'traditional-archaic', and the latter is a constitutive moment of the 'logic of modernity'.[20] That there is an oscillation between them is the sign that they stand to each other as dynamic binary opposites. The Russian historical experience is characterized by their coexistence, of a kind that, at critical junctures, has issued in tension and conflict between them. Oscillating toward the syncretic algorithm is tantamount to stagnation and implosion (destructive energies), while the swing toward differentiation is characteristic of innovative growth overcoming resistance to change. The picture of the Russian historical experience Akhiezer paints is that of a socio-cultural matrix subsisting on an unstable middle ground between these polar opposites, and this has hindered Russia's passage to what he names *bol'šoe obščestvo*, on the one hand, and the 'liberal civilization', on the other.

The first concept is the cornerstone of the entire theoretical edifice put in place by Akhiezer. His *bol'šoe obščestvo* recalls Tönnies *Gesellschaft*, Durkheim's organic solidarity, the structural-functionalist self-differentiating institutional order, the

[17] I will add in this connection that Akhiezer was clearly linguistically hampered as regards access to and knowledge of primary sources and research outside the Russian language, a circumstance that put him squarely within 'Soviet culture'.

[18] To discover whether this is so or not, the scholar needs to take in hand Akhiezer et al. (2008). The study applies the basic categories of Akhiezer's cultural hermeneutic of the Russian historical experience. Available online at: http://publ.lib.ru/ARCHIVES/A/AHIEZER_Aleksandr_Samoylovich/_Ahiezer_A._S..html

[19] An English translation appeared in *Russian Studies in Philosophy*, 1997, 36, 3, pp. 27–53. A second instalment of the same essay appeared in *Voprosy filosofii* 1998, 2. Over the years since then, Akhiezer published several more pieces in *Voprosy filosofii*. The last appeared posthumously.

[20] Akhiezer is thus fairly described as being neither a Slavophile nor a Westernizer.

liberal society of the enfranchised citizen; its counterpart is the *lokal'nyj mir*, *Gemeinschaft*, mechanical solidarity, face-to-face affective bonds, kinship relations, etc. The 'big society' amounts to a socio-cultural matrix within which the 'subject' engages in practices mediated by institutions that have acquired extra-local, 'abstract' (space–time) significance and legitimacy. Akhiezer's purpose was to discriminate the factors that clustered round this critical historical juncture when the *bol'šoe obščestvo* began to emerge, this 'axial' moment in the growth of civilizations (he refers to Karl Jaspers), and to explore the forces at the heart of the Russian imaginary that rendered the passage to the *bol'šoe obščestvo* problematic.

Reading Akhiezer: a closer look

As should be evident now, Akhiezer's method and model are 'socio-cultural' in character, with the emphasis falling on 'cultural'. Culture is understood generically as the infusion by the 'subject' of meaning into an inchoate and inherently uncertain world. The meaning involved may be better termed 'significance' in that the latter expression carries a distinctly evaluative connotation—'normative ideals' underpin significance—that corresponds better than semantic meaning (the meaning and reference of signs and symbols) to cultural meaning. Clearly, in the Russian context this kind of position ran counter to the principal Marxist thesis concerning the determination by 'social being' of 'social consciousness'; if anything for Akhiezer the opposite would be true.[21] Meaning production takes place in a 'subject-specific' form (specific practices), i.e. practices ground social relations relative to specific ends that a given collective—the 'subject'—with its traditions perceives as significant. Thus the 'cultural'—significance (values; ideals)—and the 'social'—practices—go hand in hand. The 'coordination', the contact of the 'cultural' and the 'social', depends on the kind of 'algorithm' (or imaginary) that is operative throughout. Logically, therefore, there may be a plurality of socio-cultural matrices; Akhiezer does not countenance the hypothesis that a master plan underlies the historical record of all cultures. Just as he eschewed the Marxist conception of successive social formations—the *formacionnyj podkhod*—he likewise took distance from the concept of modernisation.[22]

[21] Interestingly, Akhiezer did not contribute an analysis and criticism of Marxist (and Marxist-Leninist) historiosophy and socio-cultural ontology. However, he did examine the *socio-cultural phenomenon* of Bolshevism in the light of his hermeneutic of the Russian historical experience (more about this in the last section of this essay).

[22] Charles Taylor refined a distinction which is central to his own cultural hermeneutic, that between *acultural* and *cultural* modernity (Taylor 1993). The former has been the salient paradigm of modernistic theories of social development, typically that of Marxism with its emphasis on the 'materialist' explanation of the socio-cultural matrix. Taylor insists that 'modernity' so conceived is but an imaginary that remains blind to itself, that is, it in fact conveys, however implicitly, the values (meanings) of an Atlantic civilization grown to universal prominence—'local' values of the true, the good, and the beautiful. Akhiezer would have most certainly adopted Taylor's stance in favour of 'cultural modernity').

A more elaborate presentation of Akhiezer's method and model would include close examination of the following key points.

(1) Akhiezer anchors cultural production in, first, the search for existential security in an inherently uncertain natural milieu and, second, the way in which, as a means for the sake of the first, the given 'subject' appropriates accumulated cultural capital. The term 'subject', as remarked, has a diffuse reference; it is any human agent standing within relations constitutive of a group, a socio-cultural matrix. The appropriation of the accumulated cultural capital is conditioned by occurrent circumstances, including processes 'outside', in the natural environment, such that this capital undergoes some degree of modification in accordance with the 'subject's' sense of the needs of the moment. The double movement—exploiting existing resources to ensure meaning in the present and innovating on their basis in order to respond effectively to perceived problems, increasing complexity etc.—is termed 'interpretation'. In Akhiezer's cultural hermeneutic, interpretation is a mode of meaning production that is innovative, constructive, drawing on past resources not only in order to cope, but rather to respond constructively to emergent needs or to ward off threats.[23]

On the whole, the picture here is not the Hegelian one of a cultural process coming to fruition (self-knowledge) as it rationalizes the world. In light of the remarks above concerning the 'imaginary', it seems to be more in keeping with the neo-Kantian conception of value and culture (e.g. Heinrich Rickert, Max Weber). Here the world is 'chaos', bereft of intrinsic order and inherent meaning (value) as far as the 'subject' is concerned who engages synthetically in the construction of a 'subjectively meaningful' world (*Wertbeziehung*), overlaying 'chaos' with a patina of socio-cultural significance (*Wertideen*), a symbolic order that remains heterogeneous, alien to, its nominal natural substrates. The only basis for the perceived metaphysical solidity of the 'world' is, on this conception, the group-specific, collective engagement in socio-cultural re-production.[24]

Or again, adopting the language of Nelson Goodman, we could say that Akhiezer was alive to the idea that a 'world' is relative to a 'way of world making'. 'Worlds'—socio-cultural matrices—are relative to what within them counts as representation, valuation, differentiation, organization, that is, symbolization and the 'languages' (symbolic practices) in which significance is actively construed. In the main, this comes down to the following affirmation with regard to the socio-cultural problematic: a socio-cultural matrix does not exemplify a determinate 'essence', there are no cultural constants in any other but a statistical, contingent

[23] Cf. *Trudy*, chapter 5, "Filosofskie osnovy sociokul'turnoj teorii i metodologii".

[24] Compare this with Max Weber: „Kultur ist ein vom Standpunkt des Menschen aus mit Sinn und Bedeutung bedachter endlicher Ausschnitt aus der sinnlosen Unendlichkeit des Weltgeschehens. (…) Eine Kulturerscheinung ist die Prostitution so gut wie die Religion oder das Geld, alle drei deshalb und nur deshalb und nur soweit, als ihre Existenz und die Form die sie historisch annehmen, unsere Kulturinteressen direkt oder indirekt berühren, als sie unseren Erkenntnistrieb unter Gesichtspunkten erregen, die hergeleitet sind aus den Wertideen, welche das Stück Wirklichkeit, welches in jenen Begriffen gedacht wird, für uns bedeutsam machen. (…) Kulturmenschen sind die, die (…) mit der Fähigkeit und dem Willen begabt sind, bewusst zur Welt Stellung zu nehmen und ihr einen Sinn zu verleihen."

Quotation taken from Daniel 2001, p. 449.

sense. Quoting Akhiezer: "… culture is considered as existing only in the process of constant, moment to moment [*ežesekundnye*] interpretations by a corresponding subject. Outside of and without interpretation culture is impossible. There exist infinite [*bezkonečnye*], materially objectified incorporations of culture which can be recognized as 'culture' only as a result of interpretation, de-objectification [*razpredmečivanie*]. At its core a world-view involves man who understands and clarifies the world, and who is the subject of an infinite reinterpretation of culture" (Akhiezer 2000, 220–21).

However, Akhiezer instils a note of caution, a reservation that counters the rising impression of 'cultural idealism'. The underlying 'chaos' can spring up and bite the hand trying to tame it, that is to say, the culture can turn out to be dysfunctional, ineffective against external threats, increasingly incapable of responding to 'problems' at the interface with 'nature' and fails innovatively to manage rising internal complexities. Tensions rise, conflicts emerge, sowing disorder, syncretic tendencies take the upper hand, the danger of collapse ('catastrophe') looms. It is thus a central, and realistic, component of Akhiezer's outlook to underline the 'ontological' frailty of the socio-cultural matrix, the extent to which it is susceptible to catastrophes, either those caused from without ('nature's' forces), or those rising from internal anomalies which can no longer be held at bay. Akhiezer pays special attention to the latter, for here the story he wants to tell about the Russian historical experience acquires its characteristic pathos.[25]

(2) The processes just described are driven, in all socio-cultural matrices, by a "dual (binary) opposition" held in a tensile union on a middle ground (a *mezhdu*)[26] out of which either innovative cultural productions (*novye smysly*) emerge—the move to the creative pole of the opposition—or, indeed, quite the opposite, disorder and the potential for collapse—the move to the opposing, syncretic pole. The energy at the heart of the 'dual opposition' involves either, on the one hand, dynamic intermingling (*vzaimoproniknovenie*) of new and accumulated meanings—"mediation"—or, on the other, their mutual repulsion (*vzaimoottolkivanie*), a separation that pits the new against the old—with potentially catastrophic consequences in case 'mediation' is overtaken by what Akhiezer calls 'inversion', in particular returning to archaic, syncretic foms, a shift that is generally violent, destructive.[27]

This configuration of the dual opposition is laden with historical and symbolic meaning in the Russian context—it is, to reiterate, *raskol*. A first general characterization of *raskol* is this: in any socio-cultural matrix, there can exist not only distinct but directly contrary (*protivopoložnye*) systems of meaning-construction (*smysloobrazovanija*), and therefore discordant, conflicting values and practices. However, in addition, "*[r]askol*, is based on a vicious circle, that is, on a situation in which the activation of values belonging to one part of society activates the values of the other part, but with the opposing valence". (*Trudy*, p. 43)

[25] *Trudy* contains an extensive part devoted to 'Katastrofy v prirode i obščestve kak nravstvennaja problema (na istoričeskom opyte Rossii)', pp. 157-332.

[26] There are references to Bakhtin and Vladimir Bibler in Akhiezer's texts: meaning is constituted 'between meanings', in a dia-logic. (Akhiezer, Šurovskij 2005).

[27] Cf. chapter 3 "Civilizacionnaja specifika rossijskogo obščestva" of part I of *Trudy*: "Specifika rossijskoj istorii", pp. 41–47.

Occasionally, Akhiezer slips into a kind of physicalistic talk to make his point. "Raskol", he writes, "is a specific kind of machine disorganizing society, a powerful source of entropy, since insofar as they activate each other the rival parts affirm themselves at the expense of the whole" (ibid.).

Here it needs to be emphasized that, as Akhiezer characterized it, *raskol* is not merely an effect, a symptom of something else, something more fundamental, having gone awry; it is on the contrary a *way* in which a given socio-cultural matrix is internally structured, it is the way in which the given society reproduces itself; a particularly unstable yet nevertheless dynamic 'way of worldmaking'.

I refrained from writing "the way in which the society *as a whole* reproduces itself". The point is that, in one way, the particular organization of the 'dual opposition' in the *raskolotoe obščestvo* blocks the emergence of a coherent whole, signified and experienced as such by subjects. *Raskol* connotes the inadequate interpenetration, within the society as whole, of its parts, the sub-cultures; it is a society in which the mutual repulsion of distinctive systems of meaning has hypertrophied. On the other hand, however, there is a 'wholeness' here in as much as no subject within the space–time frame of the *raskolotoe obščestvo* is not caught up in the 'dual opposition', is not directly affected by the tensions to which it gives rise. It is a 'wholeness' with, among other things, a psychological dimension, viz., a lingering sense of unease, discomfort, alienation on the part of individuals and groups from the broader environment, a longing therefore for 'comfort', a 'return to the womb', so to speak. In this way, the local, the face to face, the affective and familiar, the immediate take the upper hand, to the detriment and exclusion of what is 'alien', which is to be resisted, destroyed even, at best perhaps adapted, integrated into the local world in terms of the latter's algorithms rather than recognizing those of the 'other'.

Thus, for Akhiezer, the state of the 'whole' in question is always relative to the 'measure' (*mera*), the prevailing impetus governing the social-cultural 'machine' at any given time (in particular, however, relative to times when the contrasting forces in the socio-cultural matrix are in evidence). Is this impetus—and the resulting 'measure'—centrifugal, expansive, differentiating, dynamic, and thus innovative in relation to accumulated experience, or is it instead centripetal, in self-denial, so to speak, as regards potential for differentiation and higher order (abstract) symbolization, and thus increasingly susceptible to implosion?[28]

(3). With this much in hand, we are in a better position to understand how and why, according to Akhiezer, *raskol* in Russia persistently undermined the emergence of *bol'šoe obščestvo*. In general, so marked and persistent has *raskol* been in Russia that it is tantamount to a 'civilizational' form (an algorithm) in its own right, affecting virtually every aspect of the 'subject's' being and development. That is to say, the cultural-civilizational process has thrown up, in Russia, a kind of middle ground (*promežetočie*) that is the permanent possibility (risk) of oscillation between patterns of significance characteristic of 'archaic-traditional' socio-cultural matrices and the patterns that are the hallmark of 'liberal' civilization (in which "utilitarian" (instrumental) rationality predominates). To reiterate, in Russia both patterns have been and continue to be present, the tensions between them having

[28] On 'mera' and the 'meždu' cf. *Trudy*, chapter 4, "Sfera Meždu, ee osmyslenie", 425–446.

only rarely found resolution in 'dia-logue' and 'mediation' but most often instead in destructive upheavals (the tendency to 'inversion', that is, syncretic collapse into archaic states that abhor the new, has been paramount).[29]

Akhiezer includes at least the following parameters in the socio-cultural account of the conditions of 'big society'. (I present them mixing his terms with my own.)

- the crucial step beyond the logic of 'local worlds' (rife with syncretic tendencies, distrust of the 'new')
- dialogue among the subcultures of 'society as a whole'
- a 'political culture' (that is, forms of communicative behavior conducive to supra-local patterns of perception as well as dialogue for the sake of consensus); related to this:
- (a degree of) awareness of the 'constructed' nature of social being and the algorithms of meaning production at its basis that is conducive to collective choice (*'bazovoj konsens'*) of society-wide normative ideals (an argument for legitimacy?)
- the diminishing import of authoritarian-totemic and *sobornost'*-communitarian ideals of socio-cultural order (typically cyclical in character, and therefore tending to the archaic) to the benefit of what Akhiezer labels 'utilitarian' consciousness (Weber's 'instrumental rationality' supplanting 'substantive rationality'), which is at once iconoclastic, innovative, but inherently risky
- the emergence of 'abstract' symbolization and 'formal' institutions—such as the law—which structure person-to-person relations in ways transcending local customs and ritualized practices (rooted in the affectivity of kinship relations)
- the growth of knowledge-based social relations, where innovative 'interpretations' acquire precedence over 'extrapolation' and mere 'adaptation' to established forms ("new wine in old skins")

Two salient conditions are the last two, the role of 'abstract knowledge' and 'formal institutions' or practices both of which not only transcend but also relativise particular, local interests. Think of 'money', contractual forms of financial transactions (rather than barter), central banks with capital assets, market mechanisms operating on a global scale, and you begin to get a feel for the idea as well as its relevance for an account of the hesitant, conflict-ridden emergence of 'big society' in Russia. Practices of the kind cited relativize, indeed render obsolete 'local perceptions' and 'values';

[29] In a discussion with Akhiezer about the difficulties 'bolšoe obščestvo' has run up against in Russia, Igor Jakovenko sums up their view as follows: "… a rather unique situation arises when in the framework of a single society two typologies of human consciousness exist. On the one hand, the administrative, bureaucratic mentality of a political elite, which has arisen in the same land that is shot through with currents of archaic consciousness, and which has grown to understand why a state and therefore the big society are required. On the other hand, the mass consciousness of the lower echelons deprived of any understanding of the need for big society; indeed not only do they not understand this, they also refuse to recognize the authentic nature of the state. A man from the lower echelons conceives the world as a kind of 'matrëška' in which the patriarchal family, or the state itself, resemble each other structurally. This man treats the big society as if it were his native village, and he imputes to the state [normative] ideals drawn from archaic nativist existence. […] … the specificity of Russian history and civilization lies in this paradoxical duality within the culture."

they are 'indifferent' to the cycles of meaning within affect-laden 'local worlds'.[30] For example, convertibility of currencies on the financial markets makes it childish to believe that the value of money is equivalent to some concrete valuable substance for which it stands and that, in certain situations, might simply be the very objects of exchange (barter; the shadow economy, *blat*). Money has long since become a 'power', something virtual, no longer requiring material equivalents, invisible rather than visible (i.e. the blips running along a computer screen as you complete a purchase using a credit card).[31] Moreover, in this form, the existence of money has spawned an economic 'knowledge' sustaining modes of economic agency the import and success conditions of which have nothing more to do with the 'exchange logic' typical of local worlds.[32]

Another point to consider in this conception is 'political culture', the third and fourth points above. But before turning to that (in connection with Akhiezer's analysis of Bolshevism), we need to look once again at the 'subject'. I remarked above that Akhiezer appears to elide a cultural determinist vision of the socio-cultural matrix with a kind of neo-Kantian *Sinnverleihung* by *Kulturmenschen* (Weber's expression, see above note 24). Not individuals *per se* are agents of meaning; rather they are caught up in predetermined practices of signification that both structure and enable 'ascriptions of meaning', though not necessarily in the ways and with the results agents may believe obtain. The qualification the last clause introduces refers to the dual opposition, the potential conflict within *raskolotoe obščestvo*. In the absence of the latter, the weight of cultural determinism would be lifted, since the phrase 'predetermined practices of signification' could be parsed to give simply 'rule-governed', the paradigmatic example of which is language use. But it is the 'dual opposition' as characterized by Akhiezer which obviates this move.

Akhiezer's sense of the 'big society' appears to comprise a holist social ontology as regards the status of the 'subject'. The forces at work in the *raskolotoe obščestvo* are of a kind and force such that no individual could be said to stand free of them.

[30] In my conversations with Akhiezer, he was surprised by my 'naiveté' with regard to the 'real' Russia. Moscow, he insisted, is hardly Russia—I need to go 'v glubinke' where 'arkhaika' reigns supreme.

[31] Akhiezer writes (1997, 32): "What are abstract forms of communication? A man who issues an order may be unseen and the order itself appears in an abstract form—a text, a slip of paper, a law created by the state having a binding force. The law is unseen, unfelt, but it is binding. Whatever be the emotive state of any man it [the law] remains an objective requirement (*zadannost'*), as real as this axe or animal. Money is among the most important abstractions. (I am not talking about money under socialism. All the controversy about the functions of money under socialism had little sense since they overlooked the fact that money is first of all a cultural category.) Money is first of all an abstract universal medium completely beyond the understanding of an archaic man. A man from the local community understands what a fish is, what a hare is. But what is money as such? To understand this, the materiality of things has to be transcended."

[32] I am reminded here of the 'social ontology' discussion around the work of John Searle (*The Construction of Social Reality*, New York, London: Free Press, 1995) and its application to economic theory (viz. Hernando de Soto's 'mysteries of capital'). Searle writes about "the huge invisible ontology" of social reality, which in the present context could well be parsed as the ontology of *bol'šoe obščestvo*. No doubt some part of Akhiezer's musings on such themes was due to the *raskolotoe* character of Soviet society, in particular the economy: the centralized, all-Union economic process (the semblance, the simulacrum in light of the ideological rhetoric, of a 'big society') was set off by the 'shadow economy' of local exchange and services (*blat*).

That is to say, the kind of societal tendencies Akhiezer trains his sights on (at least as far as the Russian historical record is concerned) 'override' individual intentions and behaviour and bring about 'unintended results' (Durkheim's *faits sociaux*). Should we conclude, then, that Akhiezer cleaved to the kind of societal ontological holism which has gone by the name of 'collectivism' as opposed to 'individualism'?

Despite appearances it would be a mistake to draw this conclusion. Akhiezer's idea of the 'big society' is precisely that of a socio-cultural matrix which fosters, among other things, the values ('normative ideals') of individual rational agency in the setting of an institutional order which sustains and promotes them. Akhiezer speaks in this regard of 'liberalism', of a 'liberal civilization' in which innovation is the prerogative first of all of individual incentive (enterprise) as well as rational collective choice. In Russia, however, riven by the pendular oscillation of cultural mentalities, the emergence of liberal civilization has been hampered. Thus the reference above to 'unintended consequences' in the strong sense of overriding intentional behaviour is not a matter of social ontology, it is for Akhiezer a question of meaning, therefore of culture.

What then is the standing of the 'subject', that is, 'subjectivity' in this model of the Russian cultural process? The bottom line is simply this: the socio-cultural category of the individual, the rational agent—the 'subject' relative to the corresponding 'liberal' socio-cultural matrix—remains an indeterminate magnitude. Akhiezer's model can therefore be read in part as a cultural history of the 'modern subject' in Russia, a history which has yielded ambiguous results at best. The dual opposition, *raskol* and its pernicious consequences, has short-circuited the consolidation and interiorisation of the normative ideal of the 'liberal' subject.

It is worth noting in passing that a significant body of research by Russianists shows just how vexed the discourse of 'subjectivity' (as part of a conceptual grid that includes 'self' (*ja*), 'individual' (*individ*), personality/person (*ličnost'*, social subject (*social'nyj sub''ekt*)) has been throughout modern Russian culture, including the Soviet period (Haardt/Plotnikov 2007/2008). Reading Akhiezer in this regard is helpful in coming to a better understanding of issues that have not ceased to concern observers, both in and outside Russia, since the demise of the Soviet Union. Would Russia 'finally' manage to construct a 'liberal' market economy; a 'civil society' in which citizens' rights are promoted; an effective state of law and due legal process; a public sphere conducive to constructive critical exchange about matters crucial to social equilibrium, and the like? In short, would the post-Soviet context give rise to the open and free society, the realm of the self-appropriated subject, able to recognize and cope constructively with mounting pressures within the social body? In effect, these are issues often associated with the question of Russia's 'political culture'. (Akhiezer 2002b).[33] However, for Akhiezer political culture in Russia in the 20th century is indelibly, and detrimentally, marked by 'bolshevism'.

[33] Cf. The piece is a typical Akhiezer 'application' of the general cultural hermeneutical model, this time to the requirements of political science and its theories.

Bolshevism: the impossible extrapolation and the absence of 'political culture'[34]

Time and again Akhiezer expounded the following thesis. Bolshevism had the potential of bringing about—for Russia as a whole—a 'dia-logue', that is, of mingling the contrary logics of meaning production (the dual opposition) in Russia, the archaic-traditional and the modernizing liberal, innovative, state-reformist principles. One reason for this is that Bolshevism rid Russia of tsarist despotism, brought the 'masses' into the socio-cultural process, and sought to break down established socio-cultural divisions. Another was that, as a Russian calque of European Marxism, it was on the side of 'modernization' for Russia. However, it was not this project, the idea as such which was to have catastrophic consequences, but, according to Akhiezer, its mode of implementation. In the terms of Akhiezer's socio-cultural logic, the Bolsheviks (Lenin) set about to *extrapolate* the pattern of meaning production rooted in the archaic traditional forms of life for application to a proto-'big society' hitherto absent in Russia. In particular, they set up a Soviet State conceived on the basis of pre-statist values of the communal 'local worlds', in this way projecting affect-laden relations typical of local worlds onto the extra-local 'societal' level.

In effect, this account, however, judged for historical accuracy, pertains to 'political culture'. The Bolsheviks championed a social mass in which political awareness was as good as absent (prescinding from the oft-noted proclivity of the mass for anarchic behaviour—*Pugačevsčina*). Inevitably, therefore, anything they could achieve in the aftermath of the revolution had to depend either on 'extrapolation' from archaic behavior patterns (rather than on innovative 'reinterpretation') or on the knout. In addition, of course, the Bolsheviks disdained Russian 'spiritual' culture prior to the Revolution, thus foreclosing in advance on the possibility that this spiritual culture harboured means—in the first place 'ethical values'—for effectuating the passage to the big society.

That a kitchen-maid could conceivably become a commissar, that workers could effectively run a factory without the 'bosses', that proletarian science could dispense with established science, etc. came down to the identification of 'socialist' institutions and forms of practice with the face-to-face, affect laden experience said (idealistically) to characterize Russian communal life founded on tradition. "All power to the Soviets"—that is to say, to local worlds the 'logic' of which was extrapolated to the self-representation of Soviet society as a whole and the Soviet State. As such the latter thus neither 'represented' the people nor sought political legitimacy. Instead, Society and State merge in "the moral and political unity of party and people", a clear instance of syncretism as a normative ideal (in Akhiezer's terminology). Distinctions are conflated and collapse, including the boundaries between 'collective' and 'personal' life. The mono-stylistic and mono-logical (rather than dialogical) Soviet culture emerges.[35]

[34] Akhiezer together with several collaborators published a massive volume devoted to the 'sociophilosophical' meaning of Bolshevism (Akhiezer et al. 2002a). A 'short' version, in two installments, is in *Voprosy filosofii* (Akhiezer 2001/2002).

Speaking of 'political culture', it is worth recalling in this context Aksakov's Memorandum to Aleksandr II, newly acceded to the throne in 1855, regarding the then state of Russia. Aksakov inveighs on the Tsar to recognize the irreconcilable difference between the 'social' and the 'political', that is between the community, with its traditional culture which is entirely alien, he claims, to the political, and the state, which should not be pro-active in regard to communal life, but, on the contrary, subservient to the latter (Aksakov 1966). On Akhiezer's reading of the Bolsheviks' project, the political was effaced as a consequence of the 'hate' for the existing Russian state which, contrary to Aksakov's admonitions, did indeed intervene in communal life (meaning: the State prior to the Revolution was becoming an agent of social change!). The Bolsheviks destroyed that 'state', invoking the archaic ideal of an internally undifferentiated communitarian order extrapolated to society-wide proportions, thus removing at a stroke the 'dual opposition' to the advantage of the syncretic ideal merging 'state' and 'people'.

From this we can conclude that although Russia has struggled with *raskol* and more often than not slipped back into inversion, denying the constructive forces of innovative differentiation, the dual opposition at the heart of *raskol* is potentially a force for change. The dual opposition is the condition for dialogue, the search for mediation, and as such brings to light the imaginary at the heart of the socio-cultural matrix. Articulating the latter is an important condition for what Akhiezer calls 'bazovoj konsens', in effect his term for social consensus and collective rationality. In other words, it is a question of a 'political culture' explicitly aware of itself and that now is based on the 'rules of the game'. The Soviet tragedy amounted then to the destruction of 'dialogue', 'mediation', the basis for social consensus, and therefore political culture. It is not clear, on the basis of the published record, whether Akhiezer imagined another, more optimistic future for Russia, a Russia emancipated from the grip of *raskol*.

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